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# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS.

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## THE DANGERS OF DEMOCRACY.\*

It is hardly open to doubt, I suppose, that the general tendency expressed by the term "Democracy" is increasingly prevalent at the present time. Some may think that what is called "Imperialism" is a strong counteracting force; but even this is at least ostensibly based upon the general will, and in any case can hardly be regarded as more than a slight and temporary check upon the democratic movement. In these circumstances it is surely important that we should try to understand the significance of this general movement and to take note of any special dangers that are incident to it. This is what I propose in the present lecture to attempt, though of course I do not aim at anything like an exhaustive treatment.

Within such limits as are here at my disposal, it will probably be wise not to attempt any precise definition of the term "Democracy." It has been used in various senses, wider and narrower, looser and more exact; but for our present purpose it is perhaps enough to connect it with its common popular description, and to regard it as covering any movement that tends to secure "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." This is what our modern Democracy is generally understood to be aiming at; and what we have here to inquire is whether there are any special dangers that are inseparable from this aim. Before we refer to its dangers, however, we ought, I think, to endeavor to be clear about its attractions. The first

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\* A lecture to Ethical and similar societies delivered at various places in South Wales.

question to be asked, accordingly is—What are the special advantages that are claimed for Democracy, and that lead to its increasing prevalence?

Now there are some who would at once demur to the form in which this question is expressed. It is not, they would say, properly a question of use or advantage at all, but rather of an essential and imperious demand of human nature. It is in this spirit, for instance, that a bright journalist has recently claimed that Democracy is an end in itself—that, even if all its results could be shown to be prejudicial, we must still value it infinitely on its own account. A writer in the *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS*, a few years ago, went even further than this, by inditing an eloquent article on “American Democracy as a Religion.” And of course the utterances of Walt Whitman on this subject are even more remarkable and memorable. Such claims may seem to others to be extravagantly overstrained; and yet I believe we can never hope to understand the power that modern Democracy has wielded if we do not bear in mind that for some—perhaps I might even say for many—it has been far more than a mere political expedient, and might almost be characterized as a religion, a passion, an end of inestimable worth. It may of course be urged that, when Democracy is spoken of in this fashion, it is not simply a particular form of government that men have in their minds. What they are thinking of is rather the autonomy of the individual man, the “glorious privilege of being independent” in the general conduct of his life and management of his affairs. And it may be urged that this independence of the individual life has no particular connection with any form of political rule—that it might be secured by a Marcus Aurelius in the imperial purple or by a Tolstoy under the Russian autocracy, as well as by a Socrates or a Thoreau under systems avowedly more democratic. But it seems clear that this would only be to some extent true. Inner freedom cannot be wholly divorced from external freedom. The autonomy of the individual must at least be harder to achieve and more exceptional in its realization when the right of self government is not in any degree recognized in public affairs. If a Tolstoy can grow in Russia, he must at

least be something of a revolutionist there. If, then, we recognize the supreme importance of inner freedom in human life, we can hardly fail to be opposed to all forms of slavery, at least as permanent institutions in human society; and it is but a step from this to maintain that no government which is not in its essence democratic can in the end be regarded as tolerable. In this sense, then, it scarcely seems an exaggeration to say that Democracy may really be regarded as an end in itself, and something to be valued with an almost religious fervor. It is on this high ground that Democracy has been defended by such men as Mazzini, and, indeed, I suppose no one could really be described as a thorough democrat who did not, in some degree, feel the truth of this contention.

In comparison with this transcendent claim, any other advantages that can be ascribed to Democracy must appear trivial and scarcely worthy of enumeration. But I believe its supporters generally value it also on some subordinate grounds. It is believed to be more truly educative for the citizen than any other form of government, to give a more complete guarantee of justice and general welfare, and to be less subject to the vagaries of individual caprice. On the other hand, it is sometimes admitted to be a little lacking in unity and inner coherence, to be distracted by party spirit, and to be somewhat inefficient in great emergencies. I do not intend to make any effort to deal exhaustively with these various advantages and defects, but will rather try to direct your attention to what appear to me to be the main points. We may perhaps be led most directly to these by considering some of the most remarkable criticisms to which the principle of Democracy has been subjected. And here we are at once confronted by a circumstance that can hardly fail to strike us, at least on a first view, as somewhat astonishing. For, if Democracy can justly put forward those high claims that have just been indicated, we should naturally expect to find among its most ardent supporters those who have felt most deeply the importance of man's moral development. It comes, therefore, as something of a surprise to find among the severest critics of Democracy the two writers in ancient Greece who did most to establish a

systematic theory of the moral life, and the two writers in modern England who have probably impressed men most by their moral enthusiasm, the two whom one can hardly help characterizing as "prophets." I mean of course Plato, Aristotle, Carlyle and Ruskin. All of these may be said broadly to regard an aristocracy of talent as the ideal form of government; and all would appear to regard Democracy as one of the least desirable forms. It is noteworthy also, in this connection, that the first two write on the assumption of the existence of a society in which slavery has a place; while one at least of the other two has explicitly defended slavery. Yet they were all face to face with governments that were to a large extent democratic; and, in most cases, it is not easy to point to any circumstances that might be supposed to have given them a personal bias against it. Hence it can hardly fail to be a profitable inquiry to ask ourselves what were the chief grounds that led these writers to distrust Democracy. This inquiry cannot here be attempted in any exhaustive form; but I may sum up what appear to me to be the main points.

I think the main dangers that are in the minds of these writers may be conveniently considered in connection with the general popular description of Democracy to which I referred at the outset. What they maintain is, in effect, that in practice Democracy fails to be what it purports to aim at being, that it is not really a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. If I am right in thinking that this is the gist of what they have to say, then I believe it will appear, upon reflection, that their criticisms are not so much attacks on *Democracy* as on *Democracies*, and that they attack these by trying to show that they fail to realize the essential principles of Democracy itself. Perhaps we may hope that some consideration of these attacks may help us to realize more fully what Democracy really is and aims at, and how it may best succeed in realizing its aims.

The first danger, then, that is apprehended in Democracy is that it may fail to be a "Government of the people"—in other words that it may only be a kind of Anarchy. This is the danger that is specially emphasized by Plato in the "Republic." "First of all," he says, "Are they not free, and does not liberty

of act and speech abound in the city, and has not a man license therein to do what he will?" Again—"It will be, in all likelihood, an agreeable, lawless, particolored commonwealth, dealing with all alike on a footing of equality, whether they be really equal or not." Again, speaking of the type of man who tends to be bred in a Democracy, he goes on—"He lives from day to day to the end, in the gratification of the casual appetite—now drinking himself drunk to the sound of music, and presently putting himself under training;—sometimes idling and neglecting everything, and then living like a student of philosophy. . . . And there is no order or constraining rule in his life; but he calls this life of his pleasant, and liberal, and happy, and follows it out to the end." Such, he says, is the life of "a man whose motto is liberty and equality." ("Republic," Book VIII, Davies and Vaughan's translation.) And he goes on to add further characteristics of the same sort. Now, it is to a large extent the same dangers that are constantly emphasized by Carlyle and Ruskin. They consider that, if you disregard the qualitative differences among men, and treat all as having a right to share in the rule of the State, you are destroying the very basis of the State. This is what Ruskin means when he says that he is "a Tory of the old school—the school of Homer and Scott," the school that believes in qualitative differences and the rule of the best, or, in Shakespeare's language, in the importance of "degree."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,  
Observe degree, priority and place.

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Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And, hark, what discord follows !

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Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong—  
Between whose endless jar justice resides—  
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.  
Then everything includes itself in power,  
Power into will, will into appetite;  
And appetite, an universal wolf,  
So doubly seconded with will and power,  
Must make perforce an universal prey,  
And last eat up himself."

The experience of modern Democracies, however, does not seem altogether to bear out this view of their anarchical tendencies. The evidence of Professor Bryce is worth noticing on this point. "Plato," says Bryce, "indulges his fancy so far as to describe the very mules and asses of a Democracy as prancing along the roads, scarcely deigning to bear their burdens. The passion for unrestrained license, for novelty, for variety, is to him the note of Democracy, whereas monotony and ever obstinate conservatism are the faults which the latest European critics bid us expect." ("American Commonwealth," Part VI, ch. cvii.) Again—"Of the uniformity of political institutions over the whole United States I have spoken already. Everywhere the same system of State governments, everywhere the same municipal governments, and almost uniformly bad or good in proportion to the greater or smaller population of the city. . . . The schools are practically identical in organization, in the subjects taught, in the methods of teaching, though the administration of them is as completely decentralized as can be imagined, even the State commissioner having no right to do more than suggest or report. So it is with the charitable institutions, with the libraries, the lecture courses, the public amusements. . . . It is the same with social habits and usages. . . . Travel where you will, you feel that what you have found in one place that you will find in another. The thing which hath been, will be; you can no more escape from it than you can quit the land to live in the sea." (Chap. cxiii.)

Are we then to conclude that Plato was completely at fault in his estimate of the tendencies of Democracy? Not, I think, entirely. Bryce himself doubts whether the uniformity which he noted in America has much connection with Democracy. "Democracy," he says, "has in reality not much to do with it, except in so far as such a government helps to induce that deference of individuals to the mass which strengthens a dominant type, whether of ideas, of institutions, or of manners." Still, this does, at any rate, throw doubt on Plato's view of the general tendency of democratic institutions. But what we must remember is that the Democracy of which Plato was thinking was in reality something widely different from that which

Bryce was observing in America, or indeed from any kind of Democracy that can be observed at the present time. He was thinking of a Democracy in which every one is actually ruler as well as subject—taking his turn of office, perhaps, by lot—whereas we practically always understand by Democracy in modern times some form of representative government. Sometimes this is thought of only as a matter of practical convenience, it being impossible for everyone to take an active part in public affairs, while yet the method of representation is more truly Democratic than election by lot would be. But it seems clear that representative government involves a considerable modification in the idea of pure Democracy. It involves the recognition that the rule is not directly that of all, but rather that of typical members; and, further, it practically always involves the tacit, if not explicit, recognition that some are better fitted than others to rule. There is thus an element of aristocracy in all modern Democracies; and even a Democratic leader like Gladstone was able to gratify Ruskin (he would not, I suppose, have gratified Tolstoy) by describing himself as an “inequalitarian.” (Morley’s “Life of Gladstone,” Book VIII, chap. v.) And an aristocracy that represents the “general will” can hardly fail to have a more pervading influence than one that rests upon a more arbitrary basis. What we may say, then, is that modern Democracy has to a large extent succeeded in avoiding this particular danger that Plato had in mind, by the device of representative government, whereby it is able to incorporate in itself an element of aristocracy, *i.e.* of what Shakespeare calls “Degree.”

Here, indeed, I cannot but think that Democracy has “builted better than it knew.” Often we find that those who represent modern Democracy have very little consciousness of the value of the element of aristocracy which it thus contains. They think of it simply as the rule of the majority, and regard it as little more than an accident, or a merely mechanical device, that the will of this majority expresses itself through selected representatives. Probably it would be quite as true to regard the selection of representatives as the essential point, and the fact that they are chosen by majorities as the mere mechanical de-



vice; though this also would be a one-sided view. It can hardly be doubted that there has been a tendency to pay an exaggerated deference to majorities, and sometimes almost to think of the expression of their will as if it were in truth "the voice of God." I think Carlyle was to a large extent right in connecting this tendency with those mechanical views of the world that have been fostered by modern physical science. The natural sciences, especially in their more exact and abstract forms, tend to eliminate the qualitative aspects of experience, and to concentrate attention on those things that can be weighed, measured, and counted. The growth of the biological sciences in recent years has once more brought the qualitative aspect of experience into prominence; and we begin to see the results of this, not only in such fantastic conceptions as those of Nietzsche, but also in more rational attempts to determine what is meant by superiority of type, and so once more to give "quality" or "degree" a real place in human life. This, however, is a very large subject—perhaps the most important of all subjects for thinking men, or at least for thinking politicians, at the present time—and here I can only hint at it. All that it is necessary to note at present is that modern Democracy seems to have partly escaped from the main danger that was feared by Plato, through declining to take its stand upon equality, and leaving open a place for the recognition of qualitative difference.

But this leads us to notice the second great danger of Democracy—viz.: that it may fail to realize the second element in its ideal, that of being a government "by the people." It may be said that modern Democracy is not really government by the people, but rather government by the representatives of an organized majority, who may not give by any means a true expression of the general will. Even the majority itself may not be properly represented. The organization of it may really have been in the hands of some skilful demagogue or influential plutocrat.<sup>2</sup> And the minority, at any rate, may be hopelessly

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<sup>2</sup> Sir Henry Maine even urges (in his "Essay on Popular Government") that government by the people inevitably comes to mean government by wire-pullers.

ineffective. Yet the minority also is part of the people; and, from the point of view of quality, to which we have just referred, it may even be the most important part. On this point, reference may again be made to Professor Bryce. "Where a majority has erred," he says, "the only remedy against the prolongation or repetition of its error is in the continued protests and agitation of the majority, an agitation which ought to be peaceably conducted, carried on by voice and pen, but which must be vehement enough to rouse the people and deliver them from the consequences of their blunders. But the more complete the sway of majorities is, so much the less disposed is a minority to maintain the contest. It loses faith in its cause and in itself, and allows its voice to be silenced by the triumphant cries of its opponents." (Part IV, chap. lxxvii.) Again—"The belief in the rights of the majority lies very near to the belief that the majority must be right. As self-government is based on the idea that each man is more likely to be right than to be wrong, and that one man's opinion must be treated as equally good with another's, there is a presumption that when twenty thousand vote one way and twenty-one thousand another, the view of the greater number is the better view. . . . A conscientious citizen feels that he ought to obey the determination of the majority, and naturally prefers to think that which he obeys to be right. A citizen languidly interested in the question at issue finds it easier to comply with and adopt the view of the majority than to hold out against it." (Chap. lxxxiv.) Thus the minority tends gradually to be silenced altogether, a tendency which Bryce describes as "the Fatalism of the Multitude."

It is perhaps this, more than anything else, that Carlyle has in view in his denunciations of Democracy. He has confidence in nothing but his Heroes, or supremely wise men; and they of course are very few. Hence he is horrified by the tendency to a constant silencing of their voices by the shouts of the majority, and is inclined to believe that Democracy, even in its most modern form, provides no machinery at all for securing that what is worthiest in the people shall have any chance of ruling. "The notion," as he scornfully puts it, "that a man's

liberty consists in giving his vote at election-hustings, and saying, 'Behold, now I too have my twenty-thousandth part of a Talker in our National Palaver; will not all the gods be good to me,' is one of the pleasantest!" ("Past and Present," Book III, chap. xiii.) Obviously Democracy, in this sense, does not go far to secure the ideal of self-government for its citizens. And, indeed, this way of looking at it almost forces us to ask, What do we really mean by the self-government of a people? If we mean that every individual among the people is to exercise the right of government, then it seems clear that to secure (or, it may even be, to fail to secure) the twenty-thousandth part of a representative in what is, after all, only one part of the machinery of government, is not a very satisfactory way of realizing this ideal. But perhaps this is not what we really mean.

When we speak of the self-government of a people, we are, I fancy, thinking of the people as a whole, as if it had almost an individual life. And I think we are to a large extent justified in doing this. Any people, worthy of the name, is a real unity, capable of acting, thinking, and feeling together. And what is meant by the self-government of such a people is that the ruling principle lies within itself, that it is, somehow, contained within the life of the whole. This does not mean that each individual rules, nor even that each individual has any considerable share in ruling. What it means is rather, on the one hand, that there is no sovereign who controls the system in a purely external way; and, on the other hand, that there is no subject who is controlled by it in a purely external way. All are real members in a living whole.<sup>3</sup> But if that is what we properly mean by self-government or Democracy, we may accept it as an end in itself, a thing of supreme worth, and yet regard representative systems and the reckoning of majorities as little better than mechanical devices, whose only value lies in their contributing to the possibility that each one may share, to some extent, in the life of the whole. If this is what Democracy means, it really involves

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<sup>3</sup> I should like to refer, in connection with this point, to Bosanquet's treatment of the "General Will" in his "Philosophical Theory of the State."

in itself a considerable element of what is commonly called Aristocracy. Perhaps the ideal Republic of Plato would, in this sense, be more truly Democratic than many modern states that lay claim to the designation. For what could be more truly Democratic—in the sense of the real self-government of the whole—than Plato's principle of ideal justice, that every one is to fill the place and perform the work for which he is best qualified? If his Republic falls short of the true Democratic spirit, it is only in so far as the rulers are conceived as dealing with those whom they govern too purely from above, while no adequate provision is made for the cultivation of the spirit of citizenship in the lowest class of the people. This no doubt is foreign to Democracy; and, as Aristotle was well aware, it was also this, more than anything else, that made Plato's ideal unworkable. A real Democracy, in short, must be aristocratic—it must aim at government by the best; and there can be no practical realization of aristocracy except through the cultivation of the Democratic spirit—the spirit that is ready to recognize that to be governed by its best is to be governed by itself.

We are often told that what stands in the way of our advancement in Great Britain is our suspicion of the expert; and it is sometimes thought that this is largely due to the growth of the spirit of Democracy among us. I doubt whether it has much connection with Democracy. The Americans appear to have largely outgrown it. Nor is it entirely my meaning that we should learn to trust to the expert. The expert is often narrow-minded and conservative. What I mean is rather that we must learn to put our confidence in those who are interested in particular things, in those who know about them and care about them; and must recognize that it is an essential part of the true Democratic spirit to be ready to follow where such men lead. Democracy does not mean trusting important matters to the care of "the man in the street;" it rather means finding for everything the man who is best fitted to take care of it, and leaving him to manage it. This, however, is probably the lesson that Democracies are in general most slow to learn. Louis XIV has been much laughed at for saying, "The State, I am the State;" but each of us is rather apt in practice to say,

"Self-government of the people: that means that I govern." Yet in small matters we all learn that it is not so. If we want to go to America, we do not consider how we are to navigate ourselves across: we choose a suitable steamer, and trust to the captain and crew. If we are sick, we do not collect the votes of our acquaintances as to the most suitable treatment: we rather take the advice, as a rule, of some expert physician. And this is surely a quite democratic method of procedure. We rule over the captain and the physician. We tell the one to take us to America, and the other to make us well. But they rule over us in the process. We choose the end that we think desirable: there we are very probably the best judges. But we trust to men of special skill to show us how we are to get what we want. If this principle were carried all through life, every one would be ruling in that which he knows about, and submitting to rule in that about which he is ignorant; and I cannot but think that a people in which this was the practice would be most truly a self-governing people, a people in which the true principle of Democracy was realized.

On the whole, then, I admit that a Democracy is often liable to this particular danger; that it may fail to be, in any true sense, a government "by the people." Democracy is not, in Carlyle's phrase a "Morrison's Pill." It is not something that is sure to put us right, whether we think about it or not. If Democracy is to mean anything really great and desirable for us, we must see to it that it is what we intend it to be. Self-government, in fact, means mainly this, that every one of us is trying to coöperate in securing that the rule is the best possible. But we are not really coöperating if we are interfering with some one who knows better than we do. Sometimes we may even coöperate best by standing aside:—"They also serve who only stand and wait." But generally our best service will lie in finding something that we can do—something, if possible, that we can do better, at the moment, than anyone else. If we succeed in doing this, we are, I think, in that act realizing the best meaning of Democracy and Aristocracy in one. It is the rule of the people, and it is the rule of the best. But this, you may say, is a mere ideal. Yes, and everything that is worth

anything in human life is or contains an ideal. The important thing is that the ideal we have before us should be something that has real value. Now, if we mean by Democracy only ballot-boxes and majorities, there cannot be much value in that, whether we realize it or not. But if we mean by Democracy a real self-government of the people, each one being allowed to do, and trusted to do, that for which he is best fitted, then I believe we mean something which has a considerable value for us, even if we do not wholly succeed in achieving it. Even only to aim at it, is to realize its spirit; and to realize its spirit is to go a long way towards its complete achievement.

And this leads me naturally to notice the third great danger of Democracy—that it may fail to be a government “for the people.” It was chiefly, I think, on this account that Democracy was condemned by Aristotle. Aristotle divided forms of government into bad and good, according as they existed for their own sakes or for the sake of those who are governed; and he placed Democracy among the bad ones. To most modern readers this is a paradox, because they naturally think of Democracy as being government “for the people.” But it is intelligible enough when we bear in mind the distinction between the people as a whole and the people as a mere collection of units. If each one is fighting for himself, you may say, in a sense, that all are fighting for all; but, if so, you are using the word “all” in a rather peculiar and sophistical fashion. At any rate, there can be no true harmony unless each is fighting for all. Now, a Democracy is too often conceived as meaning simply a state in which one has an eye to his own interest; and it is sometimes supposed that in this way the interests of all will be served. I think Aristotle was right in regarding a Democracy of this sort as intrinsically bad. The mere struggle of competing interests cannot reasonably be expected to lead to the good of the whole. In economics this is now, I believe, pretty generally recognized: pure *laissez faire* is a discredited principle. But is it any more reliable in general politics? Few, I fancy, would seriously, on calm reflection, maintain that it is. But if not, then we must recognize that this is a real danger confronting our modern democratic states; and it is one of the

dangers that was much in the minds of Carlyle and Ruskin, as well as in that of Aristotle. Can we hope that our modern Democracies will guard against it?

So far as I can see, the only real way of guarding against it is by the cultivation of the spirit of citizenship. The citizen must be taught to think of himself, not as an isolated individual with private interests of his own, but as a member of a great system, in which he has a definite place and function. This is perhaps most readily learned through the gradual discipline of smaller unities. The man who has learned to be loyal to his family, his school, or his club, is at least on the way to learn loyalty to the larger social unity, of which these are parts; and I believe it would be difficult to overestimate the value of this element in education. The Americans are, I believe, much in advance of Great Britain in the application of this idea; and so probably are the French, and certainly the Japanese. The essential principles of self-government may easily be acquired in schools. Interesting—and apparently successful—experiments have been made, especially in America, in the way of conducting schools on purely self-governing principles; but, without even going so far as this, it is easy to see that much may be done to make the spirit of citizenship a reality; and I am convinced that, if Democracy is ever to be a real success among us, it can only be through the cultivation of such a spirit. No one can be a genuine democrat unless he is also an enthusiast for the welfare of the society to which he belongs. We must learn, as Mazzini so constantly insisted, to concentrate our attention upon our duties as citizens, rather than upon our rights as individuals.

There are no doubt other dangers of Democracy besides those to which I have now alluded. A Democracy is commonly said to be somewhat inefficient, especially in great emergencies that call for our united action: but this is extremely doubtful; it seems to depend entirely upon the extent to which the society has become a real unity. The American government is probably as efficient as that of Russia. Again, it is sometimes said that in a Democracy there is apt to be a certain lack of an adequate sense of responsibility on the part of public

officials. There seems to be some truth in this. Bryce, for instance, notes that in America "the tone of public life is lower than one expects to find it in so great a nation. . . . In Europe, where the traditions of aristocracy survive, everybody condemns as mean and unworthy acts done or language held by a great official which would pass unnoticed in a private citizen. It is the principle of *noblesse oblige*. . . . Such a sentiment is comparatively weak in America. A cabinet minister, or senator, or governor of a state, sometimes even a President, hardly feels himself more bound by it than the director of a railway company or the mayor of a town does in Europe. Not assuming himself to be individually wiser, stronger, or better than his fellow-citizens, he acts and speaks as if he were still simply one of them, and so far from magnifying his office and making it honorable, seems anxious to show that he is the mere creature of the popular vote, so filled by the sense that it is the people and not he who governs as to fear that he should be deemed to have forgotten his personal insignificance." (Chap. xcv.) I am afraid there are some signs of such a lowering of the tone of public life in this country, as well as in America; and it appears to be a real danger of Democracy. But I need not emphasize it further, as it appears to be simply one illustration of the danger to which I have already alluded, of a misinterpretation of what is meant by government "by the people." It can only be remedied by the gradual recognition that in a true Democracy, no less than in an aristocracy, each one has his own definite place and function, his own work to do, his own responsibility to bear; that democratic rule does not mean the rule of "the man in the street," but the rule of those who know and are prepared to do. Let the man who knows control the thing that he knows about—that is the essence of good government: provided always that he is subject to the criticism of others upon the results of his work.

There may be still other dangers in Democracy. It may be apt to be fickle and commonplace and deficient in length of view.

But I have not thought it desirable to dwell upon such subordinate dangers. What I have sought to emphasize in this



paper, and what I believe to be true, is that the one great danger of Democracy—the only danger that it need ultimately fear—is that it may fail to be true to itself, that it may forget its own ideals.

I may sum up the results of the view to which I am led, and which I have been trying to bring before you, in this way. Democracy, in the best sense of the word, means the self-government of a people; and this is the highest possible conception of government. But there is a constant danger that it may be misinterpreted in practice, and become only the rule of the majority, which is certainly not in itself a high conception of government. I do not mean that we can set aside the method of estimating majorities. What I mean is that that is not the essence of Democracy, in the best meaning of the term. Democracy, in the best sense, means the rule of the people as a living whole, by the people as a living whole, and for the sake of the people as a living whole; and this ought to mean, in practice, that everything is done by him who is best fitted to do it, and under the guidance of those who know most about it. I do not believe in Plato's philosopher-king. If a real philosopher were made king, his first act would probably be to abdicate his office, or at least to secure, as rapidly as possible, that the real work of government was distributed among the competent citizens of the State. Human capacity is practically always departmental: there is no one who is fitted to be a ruler in everything; and there is hardly anyone who is not fitted to be in charge of something, and to be responsible for seeing that it is done. The truest Democracy—and the truest aristocracy as well—is a state in which everyone exercises rule, just so far as he is fitted to do so. If we constantly remember that this is what Democracy aims at, and that ballot-boxes and other instruments of government are only the machinery by which we seek to bring this about,<sup>4</sup> then I think there is some chance that our modern Democracy may gradually come to live in its own proper spirit, and to realize, through constant effort,

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<sup>4</sup> I may refer, in connection with this, to the excellent discussion of popular government contained in MacCunn's "Ethics of Citizenship."

that form of a well ordered state, at once truly democratic and truly aristocratic, of which Plato and Carlyle could only vaguely dream.

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### ETHICAL INFLUENCES IN UNIVERSITY LIFE.\*

PRACTICAL ethics is the outcome and formulation of human experience in the sphere of conduct. All societies fall upon certain customs of intercourse that become moral rules, out of which by reflection, emerge ideals. Ideals are never perfect, being determined and limited by the experience and thought of their creators; they are never attained or attainable, else they would not be ideals. But they are morally effective because uplifting and stimulating.

The value of an ethical system depends on the character of the community that creates it. The size of the community is one factor in the result; the degree of general culture is another. The advantage is not always with the majority; a small community, favorably situated, may reach an ethical height impossible for the mass.

If, indeed, the world were socially a unit, we should have an ethical ideal and ethical laws superior to anything that now exists; such ideal and laws would be for the moment universal, and would exhibit the highest possibilities of the moral thought of the time. But the world is far from being a social unit. Barriers of mutual ignorance separate continent from continent, nation from nation, and within every large community there are many groups, determined by various occupations and beliefs, and each with its separate code of morals. Thus we hear of the ethics of war, of politics, of commerce, of the pulpit, of the legal and medical professions, and of thieves. The influence of such special ethical circles is great by reason of the intimate relations and the sense of common interests that exist among the

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